

BIBLE TEACHING AND WORSHIP GUIDE



FOR THE HOME-BASED CHURCH

Produced Weekly

The Discipline of Christlike Relationships
Matthew 18:15-17, 21-35; 2 Corinthians 2:5-11

Copy this sheet for the Gathering Time, Bible Study, and Worship Experience leaders for the next meeting of the church.

Leaders' Responsibilities:

Important: Each person who will be leading one of the three parts of a session during a Unit of sessions needs to have access to the "Basic Information for Leading the Unit of Study". That information is often provided at the beginning of that Unit of sessions. The weekly session "Background" located in the Teacher Preparation is much more specific to that day's study.

1. **The Gathering Time Leader** will gather all of the people together and help them prepare their minds and hearts for a wonderful worship experience before God. His/her responsibility is to introduce the congregation to the theme (content) and the Scripture that will be central to their worship experience for the day.

2. **The Bible Study Leader** will then help the people understand what the Scriptures have to say and teach us about the content of the study for the day. He/she will guide the people to make a general application of the study (ie: How does this Bible study apply to people today?)

3. **The Worship Time Leader** has the responsibility to use the theme and Scriptures to guide the congregation to make personal commitments to God's will for each one in regard to the study for the day. He/she will use others to lead in the music, taking the offering, ministry moment comments, and other activities and parts of the **Worship Time** that can aid in participatory worship.

Prior to this Coming Session:

Each Leader:

Prepare the words to the song or chorus you will sing if they are unfamiliar to the worshippers.

Gathering Time Leader:

Obtain two candy dishes, a sweet chocolate bar, and a bar of unsweetened baking chocolate. In one dish place enough pieces of the sweetened chocolate for each person. Put a label on this dish that reads "Forgiveness". In the other dish place enough pieces of the unsweetened baking chocolate for each person and put a label on this dish that reads "Unforgiveness".

Bible Study Leader:

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The Discipline of Christlike Relationships – 01-02-07-en

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Worship Time Leader:

For the Worship Time Ministry Moment: Ask several people (or children) to prepare a skit acting out the parable of Matthew 18:21-35. They might want to put together a modern day version of the parable.

Music Sources:

“Light the Fire Again” Words and music by Brian Doerksen. Mercy Me/Vineyard Publishing, 1994. Great theme song for the unit on disciplines. From the song “... I need Your Discipline ...” From WOW Worship Songbook. Integrity Inc., 2000.

“To God Be the Glory” Words by Fanny Crosby and music by William H. Doane. Public Domain

“Lord, Be Glorified” Words and music by Bob Kilpatrick. Prism Tree Music, 1978. From Maranatha! Music Praise Chorus Book (2nd Expanded Edition). Maranatha! Music, 1990.

“Lord I Want To Be A Christian” Public Domain.

“Above All” Words and Music by Lenny LeBlanc and Paul Baloche. LenSongs Publishing, 1999. From WOW Worship Songbook. Integrity, Inc., 2000.

“Draw Me Close” Words and music by Kelly Carpenter. Mercy Vineyard Publishing, 1994. From WOW Worship Green Songbook. Integrity Music, 2001.

“God Will Make A Way” Words and music by Don Moen. Integrity’s Hosanna! Music, 1990. From WOW Worship Songbook. Integrity Inc., 2000.

“Seek Ye First” Words and Music by Karen Lafferty. Maranatha! Music, 1986. From Maranatha! Music Praise Chorus Book (2nd Expanded Edition). Maranatha! Music, 1990.

Gathering Time: (Suggested time: 15 minutes)***The Discipline of Christlike Relationships******Focal Text***

Matthew 18:15-17, 21-35; 2 Corinthians 2:5-11

Background Text

Matthew 18:15-35; 2 Corinthians 2:5-11

Main Idea

Following Christ calls believers to relate to one another with open communication, a concern for the church as a whole, and a willingness to forgive.

Question to Explore

How can church members develop and maintain Christlike relationships with one another?

Teaching Aim

To help the group commit themselves to Christlike ways of relating to one another.

Gathering Together:

Assign one person (man, woman or child) to greet people as they arrive. Use children and youth for any task that is appropriate.

As people arrive, you can set the mood by softly playing some Christian music.

As people arrive, have the greeter offer each person a piece of chocolate to eat from either dish (see preparation) so that they may choose whichever type of chocolate (sweetened or unsweetened) they would like. Let them try a piece from both dishes if they desire.

Sing "Seek Ye First" and "Lord Be Glorified" or one or two familiar hymns or choruses as a signal to begin the gathering time and to prepare for the First Thoughts.

Ask each person to introduce himself or herself if the group is small enough.

Ask the following questions:

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“If chocolate represents the richness of relationships in the church, why would we have chosen sweetened chocolate to represent relationships with forgiveness?”

“Why would we have chosen unsweetened to represent relationships in which forgiveness is not present?”

Explain that we have a choice as to whether the fellowship among those in the body of Christ is sweet or bitter. That choice is whether we cultivate an attitude of forgiveness.

First thoughts:

A Beginning Point for Relationship

Leader: Read the following scripture passage or have someone else read it.

But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness and all these things will be given to you as well. ³⁴Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own. (Matthew 6:33)

In our fast-paced world, anxiety has become commonplace. We worry about the clothes we will wear, the way we are seen by others, the money to pay our bills, the location of our next meal and on the list goes. We are in search of a way to make sense out of life. In these short verses Jesus has set the priorities for each day. We are to seek His kingdom. We are to look for the way He would have us live through the reading of His Word and prayer. Second, we are to seek His righteousness. We are to seek the reconciliation of our relationship with Him. That reconciliation does not come through our striving but rather through His grace and forgiveness when we confess Him as Lord of our life.

It is in His kingdom that we find the “place” of meaning in our lives. We have sought to build many “places” in our life, the pursuit of which has led to anxiety. Even if we reach the place we have sought to build, the satisfaction and fulfillment do not meet the expectations. Therefore, we start the cycle over again.

In the midst of His righteousness we find the wholeness that gives our heart and mind peace. It is in the midst of this most important relationship that we find the acceptance, affirmation, and sense of purpose that will transform all other relationships. The greatest change will occur within ourselves as we no longer need to pursue fulfillment through the crowd of voices that surround us all day. May I encourage you to start each day in the pursuit of these two things – His Kingdom and His Righteousness.

Closing the Gathering Time:

Take time at this point to mention items of prayer concern for the church, announcements of ministry or activities, and anything else that needs to be shared with or by the congregation. Pray for these needs. Remember to praise God in prayer.

Break time! Take five minutes between sessions. Encourage children to use the washroom so that they won't need to leave during the Bible Study time.

Distribute youth/adult Bible study outlines or paper for note taking, if available.

Also hand out the activity sheets for preschool and younger children to use during Bible Study and/or worship.

Note to the Bible Study Leader: Suggested teaching time for the Bible study should be about 35 minutes. Use the “Teacher Preparation” for your personal study during the week before the session. Use the “Bible Study Plan” for the actual session.

Teacher Preparation

The Discipline of Christlike Relationships

Focal Text

Matthew 18:15-17, 21-35; 2 Corinthians 2:5-11

Background Text

Matthew 18:15-35; 2 Corinthians 2:5-11

Main Idea

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Question to Explore

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Teaching Aim

To help the group commit themselves to Christlike ways of relating to one another.

Introduction to your personal study:

Disciplining children when they disobey is one of the toughest parts of parenting. "You did not clean up your room as I asked; therefore, you may not watch TV tonight." It would be far easier to ignore their disobedience and hope it goes away. But many parents (even in the Bible) have suffered great heartache by ignoring an erring child. The child's bad habits become deeply ingrained, and eventually those sinful traits become a part of their character. Parents who truly love their children will lovingly discipline them when they go astray.

Relationships in the church sometimes require discipline also, especially where sin is involved. Like parenting, there is a right way and a wrong way to administer discipline. The lesson today speaks of developing Christlike relationships among God's people.

Background:

Please ask for and read the information contained in the “**Basic Information for Leading the Unit of Study**”, found at the beginning of this Unit. Whoever downloaded this session for you should have that material for you as well.

Focusing on the Meaning:

Matthew 18:15-17 Seeking Reconciliation

These verses continue the thoughts in the previous verses (vv. 12-14). Using the parable of the lost sheep, Jesus showed God's concern for the wandering child. Here Jesus applied the same truth to the church, How should a strong Christian treat a weaker brother or sister? The strong Christian should never despise the wandering little one but must seek to find them and try redemptively to bring them back into fellowship. The entire situation presupposes the relationship between brothers and sisters within the local church body (note “brother” [v. 15], “the church” [v. 17]).

18:15 “If your brother sins against you....” Some of the best and earliest manuscripts of the New Testament do not have the phrase “against you” in this verse. Without the phrase, the meaning would refer more to a general situation where a brother (or sister) has fallen into sin or “wandered away” (cf. vv. 12-14). If the phrase “against you” was originally supposed to be in the text (and a good case could be made for either view) the sin referred to is a personal difference between two people (cf. v. 21). Either way, the passage presents the concern that one Christian should have for another Christian who has become sinful.

“Go and show him his fault, just between the two of you.” What kind of attitude should the stronger member have toward the weaker? The stronger should never ignore the sinful person, for the heavenly Father always has concern for the erring child (cf. v. 14). The stronger should approach the weaker alone, in a private interview. In the spirit of Christian love, show the brother “his fault,” hoping that he may repent and seek forgiveness for his sin. This encounter should never take place for the purpose of receiving satisfaction but should always be in the offender’s best interests. Jesus gave wise counsel indeed, because the normal procedure people take is just the opposite. Many times the immediate response is to tell everyone about the sin, and this probably does more harm than good. The resulting widespread gossip tends to take on a life of its own, and many times facts are discarded. Gossip could be a greater sin than the one originally committed. Regardless, talking about others does not show genuine Christian love (1 Corinthians 13:4-7). True Christian love shows concern for the fallen brother or sister and will approach them with sympathy and genuine compassion. Christians care for one another (cf. Hebrews 12:12-13, 15).

"If he listens to you, you have won your brother over." The erring brother is more likely to come to repentance in a private meeting. A public rebuke may simply make him angry and push him further away. If the brother does repent, then you have rescued him from a life of sin and have brought him back into vital fellowship with the church. You will have been God's instrument in saving your brother.

When approaching a sinner, we should always remember that we are sinners also. We should always be practicing self-examination to be clean before God (cf. 18:8-9; 1 Corinthians 11:28; Psalms 139:23-24). This self-discipline will ensure that we approach our sinful brother or sister in humility and Christian grace. Self-discipline must precede mutual discipline, and church discipline (vv. 16-17) is a last resort.

18:16 If the brother refuses to repent, do not immediately give up, but continue to work with him. Bring one or two others along. Bringing others will cause the offended person to question if the matter is really that serious. This also guards against vindictiveness. The principle in Deuteronomy 19:15 protected all parties and provided that everything is done decently and properly.

18:17 **"If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church."** There is a progression here: a private confrontation, a small unofficial group gathering, and finally the public airing of the matter of sin. As a last resort, the church must protect itself from being infected by unconfessed and unrepentant sin.

If the brother refuses to heed the counsel of the local church and refuses to break with his sin, then the church should treat him as a **"pagan or a tax collector."** Just as foreigners and tax collectors who are unconverted are considered to be outside God's kingdom, the church should consider this erring brother in the same way. And just as we seek to love and win the foreigner, tax collector and unconverted so must our intent be to bring the brother to a point of repentance and bring him back to God (cf. 1 Corinthians 5:5; 2 Thessalonians 3:14-15).

Jesus used the same words that he spoke to Peter earlier (cf. 16:19), "Whatever you [plural] bind on earth will have been bound in heaven, and whatever you [plural] loose on earth will have been loosed in heaven" (v. 18). If a church acts with Christlike love when it administers church discipline, then it may know that it acts with Christ's authority. In other words, heaven approves the action that the church makes under the lordship of Jesus Christ. Any such action must be done under his guidance and "in his name" (v. 20).

The Need for Church Discipline

Every church should expect its members to follow certain broad scriptural principles (e.g. love, holiness, sexual purity, etc.) that will bring honor to the name of Christ and his church (cf. Romans 1:29-30; 1 Corinthians 5:11; 6:9-10; 2 Timothy 3:2-4). Every Christian should joyfully submit to such standards, and the church should be diligent to guard against gross and continued violations if the erring member will not repent.

Church discipline should always be conducted under the leadership of Christ himself, be couched in love, and have the genuine intent for restoration of the sinner. God wants Christians to be reconciled to each other (cf. Matthew 5:23-24) as well as to God (cf. 2 Corinthians 5:15-21).

Matthew 18:21-35 A Lesson in Forgiveness

18:21-22 Peter followed with a more personal question, "**How many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?**" Peter may have thought he was being quite generous with the number seven. The rabbis taught that forgiving only three times was necessary. Jesus' response must have been astounding to Peter, "**Not seven times but seventy-seven times.**" It is not clear if the original Greek means "seventy *plus* seven" (i.e. 77) or "seventy *times* seven" (i.e. 490), but the exact number is not important. Jesus meant forgiving so many times that one loses count. Peter thought in legalistic terms ("**how many times?**"), thinking that forgiveness could be doled out drop-by-drop and eventually forgiveness would run out. Jesus taught unlimited forgiveness, measured by a flood that would never end. Asking how many times one should forgive is like asking, "How many times should I love my wife? Or my husband? Or my child?" A forgiving spirit counts neither grievances nor the number of times it has already forgiven. True love keeps no record of wrongs (1 Corinthians 13:5). Forgiveness is a state of the heart, not of cold calculation.

18:23-34 Jesus told a parable to teach about a forgiving spirit. He described a servant who owed his king an enormous sum of money (estimated between 12 million and a billion dollars by modern standards) that he could not repay. The servant pled for mercy, and the king cancelled his debt. The forgiven servant then found someone who owed him only a few dollars. That person pled for mercy, but the forgiven servant was unmerciful and had the man thrown into prison. Upon finding out, the king reminded the servant of his lasting obligation to forgive others because of the forgiveness he had received. The king then had this wicked servant jailed and tortured until he could pay back the debt he owed.

18:35 Summing up the parable, Jesus reminded his followers that forgiven people must forgive others, lest they show themselves incapable of receiving God's forgiveness (cf. Matthew 6:12, 14-15). We must not press the details of the parable further than intended. Jesus' point is that people who have been truly forgiven by God will be willing to forgive others. If they are unwilling to forgive others, they show by their unforgiving spirit that they have never been truly touched by God's forgiving grace. Our love for our Christian brothers and sisters is evidence that we are indeed God's children (see: 1 John 4:8, 11, 20-21).

2 Corinthians 2:5-11 An Illustration of Forgiveness

2:5-9 Someone had caused grief for Paul and the Corinthian church. The text does not tell whom that person was or exactly what they had done, but that is not important. The Corinthian church had already followed Paul's advice and had administered

discipline to the guilty party. That discipline apparently had brought the person to repentance. Paul then counselled the church to move beyond the discipline, "**forgive and comfort him**," and "**reaffirm your love for him**." The main purpose of discipline is not for punishment but for correction and restoration. Paul was concerned for the well being of the brother who had erred, "**that he will not be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow**." Having already shown signs of repentance, if he continued to suffer the condemnation of his Christian brothers and sisters he might be crushed in his spirit rather than restored in his faith.

2:10-11 The Corinthians could be assured that Paul had extended mercy towards this brother. Forgiveness was "**in the sight of Christ**," that is, as Christ would extend forgiveness to a repentant sinner. Such forgiveness would also benefit the church, "**that Satan might not outwit us**." If the Corinthians were not willing to forgive, the disciplined brother would be driven to despair, and the congregation's heart would be hardened. Both would be opportunities for Satan to have his way in the church.

Your Goal as the Leader of this Bible study:

The Scripture passages today teach about the kind of relationships Christians should have towards one another, specifically if a Christian brother or sister is sinful. Jesus taught that Christians should have a genuine sense of concern and compassion for the erring person, always seeking to restore fellowship. A three-step process of discipline (individual, small group, large group) will uphold both God's grace and his holiness. A Christian never has the right to withhold forgiveness from someone who has wronged him/her. When that person repents, they should be forgiven and embraced even as Christ himself has forgiven and restored us.

For Personal Reflection:

1. **What have I learned from this study?**

2. **What personal experience does this lesson bring to mind?**

3. **What is one action I will take this week to apply this Scripture passage to my life?**

Bible Study Plan (Suggested time: 35 minutes)

The Discipline of Christlike Relationships

Regroup the church after the Gathering Time and break by singing a chorus that young children can relate to—or another praise chorus if your congregation does not have children. Children who go to their own Bible teaching session should stay with the group until after this song. Have the preschoolers and children accompany the hymn with rhythm sticks, maracas, bells, etc. Children who stay with their parents in the Youth/Adult study should have the material on worship as suggested in **The Children's Corner** at the beginning of this **Unit** of studies. (Ask your leader who downloads the studies for those suggestions).

Begin by helping the group locate the Focal Text in their Bibles. Also, share with them the Main Idea to be learned from the Scriptures, and the Questions to be Explored by the group.

Focal Text

Matthew 18:15-17, 21-35; 2 Corinthians 2:5-11

Background Text

Matthew 18:15-35; 2 Corinthians 2:5-11

Main Idea

Following Christ calls believers to relate to one another with open communication, a concern for the church as a whole, and a willingness to forgive.

Question to Explore

How can church members develop and maintain Christlike relationships with one another?

Teaching Aim

To help the group commit themselves to Christlike ways of relating to one another.

Connect with Life:

1. As the group gathers, begin the study with this question: "If you did something that caused personal hurt to someone else, what would be the best way for the other person to deal with it?"

(a) Ignore it and hope it goes away?

- (b) Confront you publicly with it?
- (c) Approach you privately with it?
- (d) Other?

State: The study today is on how Jesus would want us to relate to one another -- specifically when a Christian brother or sister is sinful.

Guide the Study:

2. Have someone read Matthew 18:15-17.

Point out the three-step progression for church discipline presented here (private confrontation, small group gathering, public confrontation).

Ask: "Why is this three-step procedure necessary? What is the ultimate purpose of confronting this brother with his sin?" (to bring him to repentance, v. 15).

Ask: "What would probably happen if everything was aired in public at the beginning?" (gossip, discord, hardness in the offender's heart).

Ask: "Is church discipline really necessary? What would happen if the Christians did not hold each other accountable for their sin?"

Be prepared to lead in the short discussion on the need for church discipline which appears in the study guide.

3. Have someone read Matthew 18:21-22.

Ask if anyone can imagine what was behind Peter's question.

Ask: "What did Jesus mean by 'seventy-seven times'?" (unlimited forgiveness).

4. Be prepared to give a synopsis of the parable Jesus told found in Matthew 18:23-34 (can be taken from the study guide).

Have someone read verse 35.

Ask: "What was the main point Jesus was trying to convey with this parable?" **(This will probably provoke some discussion.)** Be prepared to explain that people who have truly been forgiven by God will demonstrate that by their willingness to forgive others. If necessary, be prepared to read 1 John 4:8, 11, 20-21.

5. Have someone read 2 Corinthians 2:5-11. Explain the gist of the passage:

⇒ How someone had caused grief for Paul and the church.

⇒ How the Corinthians had followed Paul's advice and exercised church discipline.

⇒ How the discipline had its intended effect and the person repented.

6. Ask: "What is the counsel that Paul gave in regard to the brother who had repented?" (Forgive and comfort him, reaffirm your love for him [vv. 7-8]).

Ask: "What do you think Paul meant by the brother becoming 'overwhelmed by excessive sorrow'?" (crushed in his spirit). Point out that the main purpose for discipline is for correction and restoration, not for punishment.




7. Ask: "What does the phrase 'I have forgiven in the sight of Christ' mean?" (acting as Christ's representative, as he would want us to act).

Then ask: "How might Satan take advantage of disharmony in the church?"

Encourage Application:

If you have two or more youth, this is the time to give them the **Youth!!! Take Ten** page and allow them to go away from the adults and apply the lesson by and for themselves.

State: The main point of this lesson is to show how Christ would want Christians to treat each other, especially when sin is involved. Jesus taught that:

-  Open communication and a generous spirit must be present in solving problems between Christians.
-  Forgiven people should always be willing to forgive.
-  Restoration of fellowship should always follow repentance.

Say: Now ask yourself these questions:

- Do I have an erring Christian brother or sister whom I need to confront privately with love and concern?
- Is there anyone from whom I am withholding forgiveness?
- Does anyone need to be brought back into our fellowship once more?

Take a five minute break to separate the Bible Study and Worship Time. Children may need to use the washroom again before worship.

Youth!!! Take Ten

Bible Study Application for Youth

You may wish to move away from the adults for the final five to ten minutes of the Bible study and help each other as youth to apply the lesson to your own needs.

The Discipline of Christlike Relationships

Matthew 18:15-17, 21-35; 2 Corinthians 2:5-11

A youth will lead the following activity and comments. No adults need to be present. If possible, teens should take turns in leading the application time.

Ask yourselves....

Is it realistic to believe that Christ's pattern of reconciliation will work in dealing with the ups and downs of youth relationships?

The principles studied today apply to relationships among Christians. Are there principles here that carry over to our relationships with non-Christian friends?

How do you go about applying those principles when your friends may not even understand them, much less think that those principles are cool or will even work?

Worship Time (Suggested time: 30 minutes)***The Discipline of Christlike Relationships***
Matthew 18:15-17, 21-35; 2 Corinthians 2:5-11**Beginning the Service:**

Sing (or play a recording) of “Light the Fire Again” as people sing-a-long and as latecomers gather for worship from Bible studies. You may wish choose other music at your discretion.

Worship leader: “It is a good thing to gather with believers to worship almighty God. We are gathered, as sinners who are saved by grace to worship the God of forgiveness. He forgives us because He prizes our relationship with Him.”

“Through His example, he sought a relationship with us while we were still sinners. So now we understand that our relationship with each other is important. That’s what Jesus taught his disciples and the multitudes about forgiveness.”

As we begin our worship time: Let’s say together the Lord’s prayer and remember how He taught us about forgiveness.

[For the following prayer – the leader should say the prayer slowly and clearly so that children may join in].

All together: “Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen.”

Sing **“To God Be the Glory”**

Sing **“Amazing Grace”** and/or **“Above All”**

Offering:

Ask a child to pray for the offering.

Ask another child to receive the offering for the day.

Or, if it is your custom:

Simply remind the congregation that the offering basket is in its customary place when it is the day for each to bring to God the resources that He will use through our church to extend His Kingdom around the world and minister to his children that He has laid on our hearts and entrusted to our church.

Ministry Moment:

Forgiveness: Have several adults (or children) put on a short skit on the importance of forgiving relationships. They might act out the parable or a modern day version of the parable Jesus told in Matthew 18:21-35.

Sharing Guide:

This sharing guide is written to assist the person who directs the worship time to reemphasize the teaching for the day and help guide the congregation to respond to God's call and will for their lives in regard to the scripture studied. The leader may choose to follow the guide closely. Or, he or she may wish to only use it to give direction and a concept for preparing an original message. The leader is free to choose other ways to communicate and share the concepts presented here.

The Overflowing Power of Forgiveness ***Matthew 18:15-35***

Three Biblical Steps in Lifting a Christian from Sin

Introduction:

The overflowing power of forgiveness and cleansing by our Saviour, Jesus Christ, should guide our relationships. In 1 John 1:9 we are called to a life of confession. The word itself means to come into agreement. In the case of 1 John 1:9, we are to come into agreement with Christ regarding the sin in our lives. This is a continuing daily process of discovery through the study of His word, prayer and relationships with the family of God. When that agreement with Christ comes in relation to our sin, we will experience the forgiveness and cleansing of Christ. Then our life can produce the fruit or benefit of that unique and dynamic relationship. The fruit as described in Galatians 5:22-23 is love, joy peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. When the world examines our relationships with each other these are the fruits they should observe. They are not common in our world but they are the things that our heart seeks to find.

In Matthew 18:15-35, we will discover what we can do to experience the fruit of Christlike relationships. We will follow the same pattern that was established in our relationship with Christ. We will follow four basic steps.

In the same way that Christ takes the initiative to establish an intimate personal relationship with us that is the result of His love for us, we must take the initiative to privately go to our brothers in Christ when we know of sin in their lives. Sin is destructive in every way. It will put a barrier between you and the awesome power of Christ. Sin will also put a barrier between you and other people. Sin has a way of twisting our thinking, exaggerating our emotions and changing our behavior.

Step One

When we see a brother trapped by an act of disobedience to Christ, we have a responsibility to go privately and confront that person. This should be done privately to allow for honest and open discussion and understanding. It should be done privately in order to confirm and clarify the specifics of what you may have thought you saw without involving more people and creating a bigger issue. It is a confrontation and some of us do not like confrontation. However, as a part of the family of God our responsibility must outweigh our comfort. Our Lord took the initiative and confronted us with a life of sacrifice that ended on a Roman cross. He also has given us His word to confront us with the truth of His plan for our lives. He now asks us to carry on by caring enough to confront each other with the truth. The passage tells us that if our brother listens, we have won him over.

Step Two

If our brother does not respond to the private confrontation we are told in the passage that we must take a second step. We must take another brother or two and confront our brother who is disillusioned and blinded by sin. The purpose in this step is twofold. First, it allows the matter to be confirmed by two or three witnesses. This is not a personal opinion but a biblical truth that is being stated. Two or three witnesses are enough to confirm a matter in court. This is a private courtroom for the fallen brother to see his sin and confess it. Secondly, it is an opportunity for the brother in sin to discover the impact on the entire body of Christ. A man tells this story: "At one point in my life, I was not walking with Christ. I will never forget a confrontation with my brother. He looked into my eyes with tears in his own eyes and asked, 'How long will you keep doing this to our family?' I thought it was my life and I could do as I desired. Little did I know that my freedom reflected and impacted all of those who loved me. It was a very sobering moment."

Step Three

Should the brother not respond to the confrontation in private or with the witness of the two or three, we must recognize the decision of the individual in sin and take it to the whole church family. There is still the hope of the brother "listening" when we take this

step. This step is to confirm the will of the one caught in sin. This is not a personal interpretation of sin or an interpretation of a small group but rather the whole body confirms it.

Step Four

If the person refuses to listen, the body must take action. They choose to recognize the will of the one caught in sin. They choose to treat the one as a pagan and a tax collector. Some have suggested that this means they are to be isolated from the fellowship of the church and to be ignored by the body. Christians from the church are not to go to their homes or visit their businesses. They are to be cut off. That does not seem to be in agreement with the practice of Christ. A tax collector and a pagan were the targets of the love of Christ. He did not identify them as disciples or include them in tasks of responsibility for the work of the Kingdom. But he did go to lunch with them, visit their homes, discuss with them on a regular basis and ultimately die for the forgiveness of their sins. This should be the path we choose to exemplify in our treatment of fallen brothers.

The Bright Side of Forgiveness

There is an underlying truth to this whole process. It is taught in the parable that closes this passage. Peter questions Jesus with this question, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me?" The question reveals the heart of a person who has seen people "listen" when confronted and restored to fellowship only to once more fall into a pattern of sin. In the midst of the process you get tired of failure and want to move on. But that is not the way of our Lord. His response was "seventy times seven". Or so many times that you forget the number of failures and focus upon the current event and the importance of winning a brother from the traps of Satan.

Call to Commitment:

God was so interested in reaching you with the gospel and loving you enough to die for you that he looked past the failure to the hope of his redeeming love. We are called his body. I have heard it said that we might be the only Bible that some people will ever read. Should our relationships not reflect that truth of those scriptures? Should there not be open communication between our members that is honest in private and public exchanges? Should we be generous enough to stop counting the failures and start looking to the future? Should we care enough to reach out to one another without judging but rather seeking reconciliation between each member and God? His love and forgiveness of each of us demands that we pour out love and forgiveness on each other for the sake of the Kingdom.

Concluding the Service:

Ask the congregation to stand and sing: “Lord I Want To Be A Christian” or “God Will Make A Way.”

Leader: Close the service with the following praise benediction.

Say: “Will everyone bow your heads before the Lord.

State firmly and with conviction:

***“Praise the Lord, all you nations;
extol him, all you peoples.
For great is his love toward us,
and the faithfulness of the Lord
endures forever.***

Praise the Lord.” (Psalms 117.)

Amen and amen. Go in God’s peace.